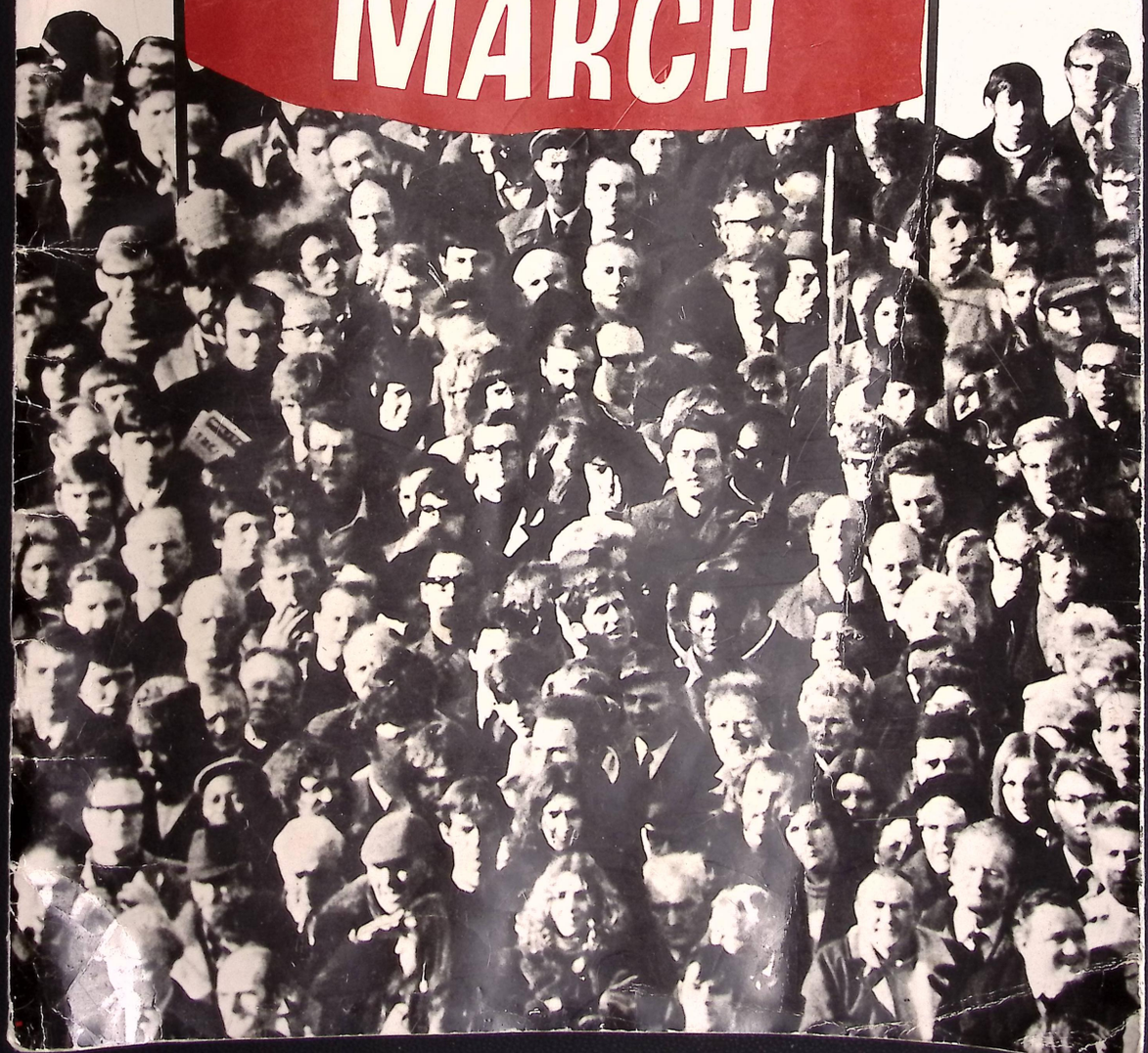
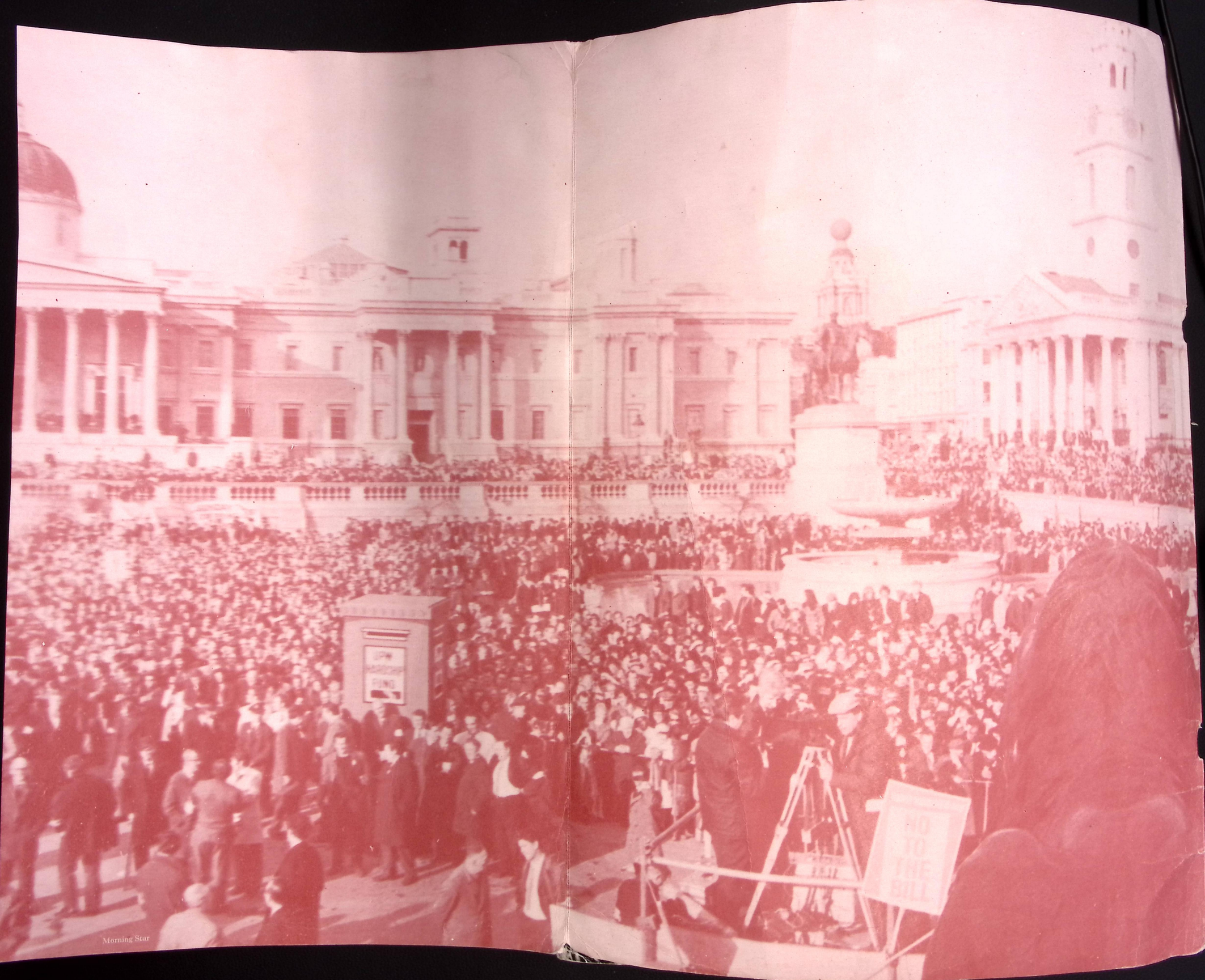
THE GREAT MARCH




Morning Star

T/SOR/22/7/21

The Great March

A commemorative collection of pictures and impressions of the TUC demonstration against the Industrial Relations Bill held in London on February 21st 1971

Trades Union Congress 18p

The Great March

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Industrial Relations Bill
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on February 21st 1971

The Great March

Sunday February 21st, 1971. A remarkable day in British history. The people came out on to the streets of London in their tens of thousands to protest.

Ordinary people. Like you and me, as they say. Veterans of pre-war marches of the unemployed, some of them. But more who had never dreamed of demonstrating. For many of them politics was a game played by others, while they got on with the work.

But now the politicians had gone too far. The time had come to say 'No' to a Bill designed to strengthen the power of their employers and weaken the hands of their unions.

From all parts of London they came. From all parts of Britain. On 34 special trains and two special planes. And 230 special buses. In cars, by bike, on foot and by bus or by tube.

Mining families from close-knit villages, white collar workers and their wives from red-brick suburbs, the cheerful coteries of men who know the unique comradeship of going to work every day while it's still dark, the laughing girls who make cloth in antique mills or the clothes of today in yesterday's workshops, the quiet farmworkers in their Sunday-best suits, the restless men from Britain's neglected areas where jobs are getting scarcer and scarcer. Thousand upon thousand upon thousand of them. Seven miles of people, ten to fifteen abreast.

And with them came the bands they had built up themselves and heard and helped in rehearsal, and the banners newly painted, or treasured works of popular art that had been carried in the depression years and earlier.

All these thousands of people, with two things in common. They were trade unionists. And they knew the Government was out to make things harder for them.

It was estimated that 140,000 came to protest. But the head counting wasn't important. It was obviously the biggest demonstration of the century—the biggest since the Chartists moved working men to demand the right to vote, 130 years earlier.

And everybody who watched the endless column move slowly from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square could see that these were

truly the people of Britain in all their variety of character and occupation—not cranks, not semi-professional protesters latching on to a new-found cause.

Even those who are paid to watch and measure such events had to shake their heads. Journalists, who have seen everything before, had never seen anything like this. The police, briefed to deal with any trouble, stood around in side streets or looked after lost children. There was not one single arrest, not one single scuffle. Yet this was the biggest invasion of central London in living memory.

Afterwards Victor Feather said 'Nobody can take away from us the glory of this day.' Few tried. The spirit that moved the marchers was infectious. Reporters on the spot caught it. And they passed it on to their office-bound news editors in Fleet Street.

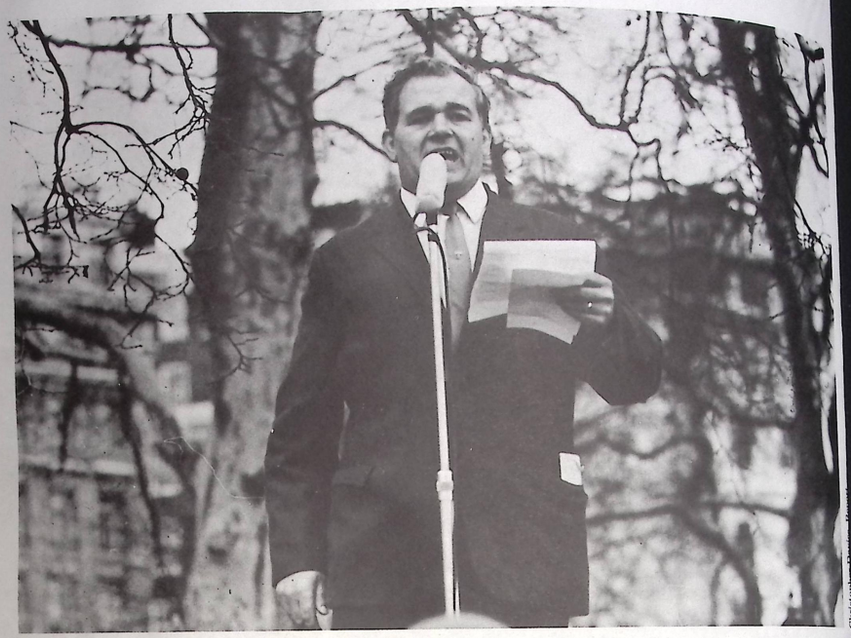
This book is for the record. It has few words, for few are necessary. The pictures tell it all. Most of them were taken by Fleet Street photographers for their own papers and we are grateful to be able to reproduce them here.

But there are some words that ought to be on the record. The thousands who came to London on February 21 were protesting about the Industrial Relations Bill. They knew it was a threat to them and because of that a threat to the vast mass of ordinary British people like themselves.

The campaign against the Bill goes on. And it will go on—Bill, Act, whatever happens—until this squalid piece of class legislation is finally buried where it belongs.

KILL THE BILL
IT'S EASY TO STOP STRIKES.
YOU JUST INTRODUCE LAWS TO SILENCE,
FINE AND JAIL WORKERS.
WHAT SORT OF GOVERNMENT IS THIS !!!
THEIR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS BILL IS FULL OF
TOUGH LAWS AGAINST THE WORKERS OF THIS COUNTRY
FOUR MILLION WORKERS TAKE HOME LESS THAN
MILLIONS OF OTHERS STRUGGLE TO MAKE ENDS MEET
THESE ARE THE ISSUES THAT CAUSE STRIKES
THE LAW IGNORES THESE.
THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS BILL IS AN ATTEMPT TO
IF IT'S A CRIME TO FIGHT FOR
A BETTER LIFE - WE ARE GUILTY
SIGN THE PETITION AND KILL THIS BILL

Christopher Davies, Report

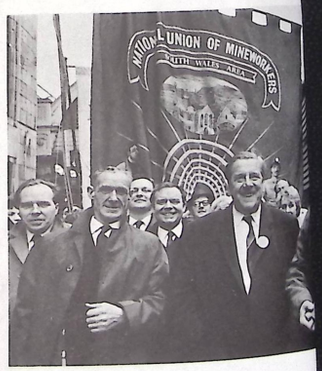


Hyde Park Orator

Maurice Styles, president of the post office workers leads the assembling thousands in song at Speakers Corner. With good humoured banter, crisp instructions and concise information through a bank of speakers he kept the thousands entertained and in order while waiting to move off.

With 500 or so stewards tirelessly working to keep everything in order the assembly at Speakers Corner became an impressive and moving demonstration in itself.

In fact the most critical comment of the day was from the one man who earned everybody's respect for his work in the Park—Jack Lucas of the T. & G. He wryly pointed out that somebody should have thought twice before they put Carr's biscuits in the stewards' lunch boxes.



Sunday lunch-time view from the Hilton

Bystanders watching the first contingents of the march move off to Trafalgar Square might easily have thought that it was a miners' gala come to town. The mineworkers were impressive enough by themselves.

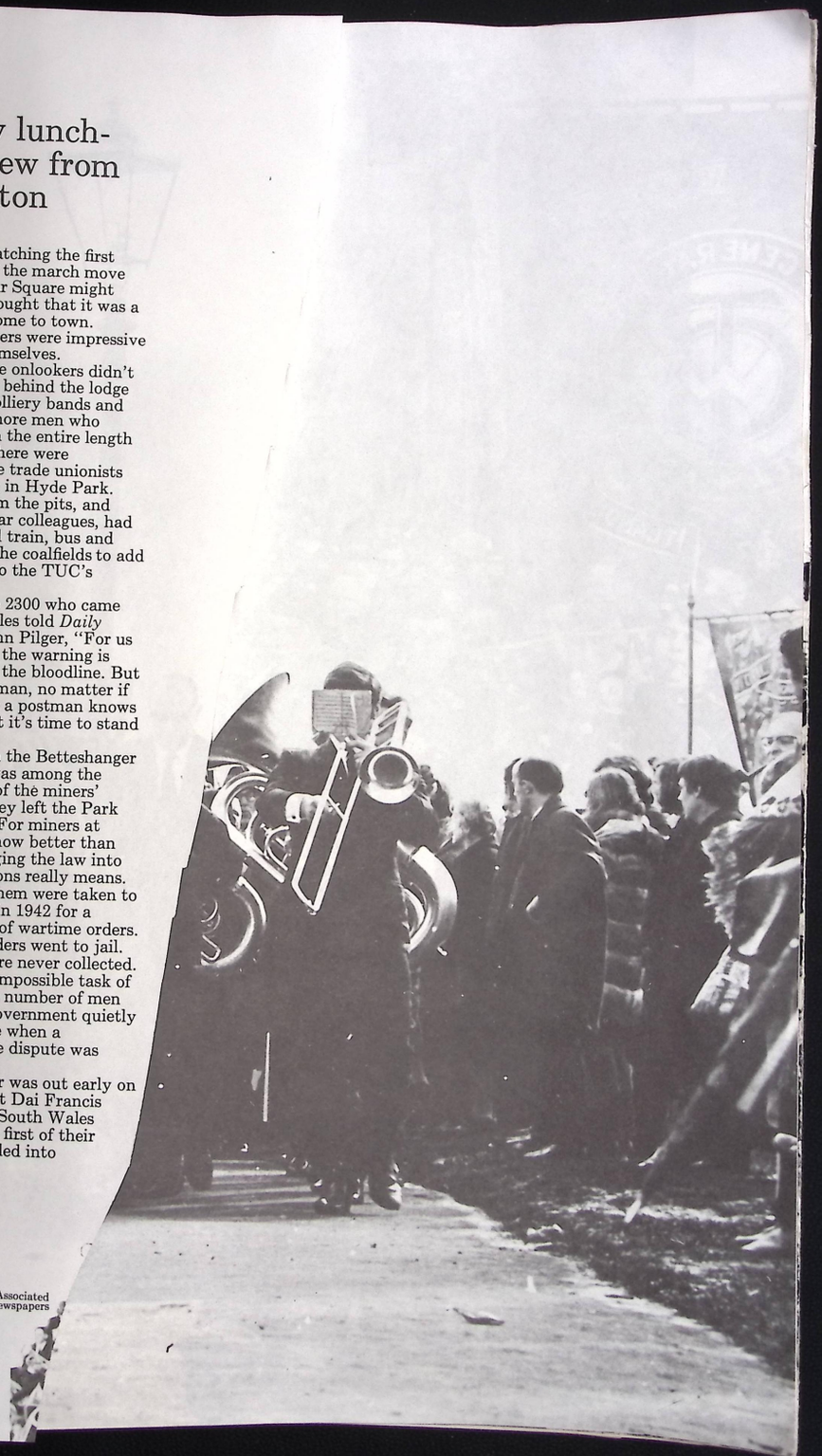
But what the onlookers didn't know was that behind the lodge banners, the colliery bands and the 5000 and more men who stretched down the entire length of Park Lane there were thousands more trade unionists still assembling in Hyde Park.

The men from the pits, and their white collar colleagues, had come by special train, bus and plane from all the coalfields to add their strength to the TUC's protests.

As one of the 2300 who came from South Wales told *Daily Mirror* man John Pilger, "For us in South Wales the warning is passed through the bloodline. But every working man, no matter if he's a welder or a postman knows in his heart that it's time to stand up again."

Aptly enough the Betteshanger Colliery band was among the leading groups of the miners' delegation as they left the Park for the Square. For miners at Betteshanger know better than most what bringing the law into industrial relations really means. A thousand of them were taken to court and fined in 1942 for a strike in breach of wartime orders. Three strike leaders went to jail. But the fines were never collected. Faced with the impossible task of committing that number of men to prison, the Government quietly dropped the case when a settlement of the dispute was reached.

Victor Feather was out early on rally day to greet Dai Francis secretary of the South Wales miners when the first of their special trains rolled into Paddington.



Associated Newspapers

KENT MINE WORKERS ASSOCIATION
BETTESHANGER BRANCH

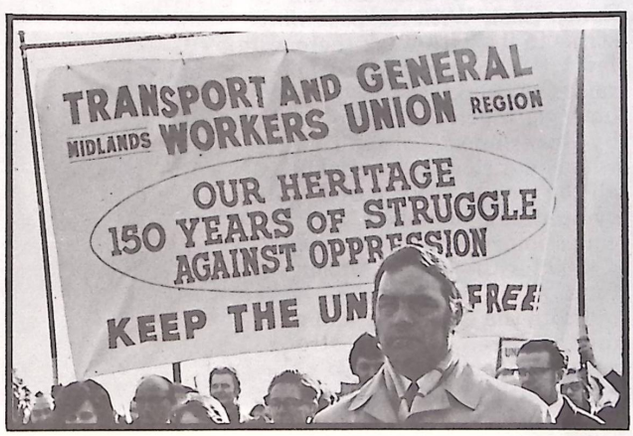
& GENERAL WORKERS UNION
GENERAL WORKERS
UNION

Morning Star

35,000 march from Britain's biggest union

Britain's biggest union—the Transport & General Workers—massed 35,000 of its members into Hyde Park for the march. There were dockers from London, Liverpool, Hull, Bristol and other major ports—5000 of them in all, thousands of car workers from Dagenham, the Midlands and the Northwest, aircraft workers from Bristol and a host of other workers from a host of other industries bearing their union banners and placards down Park Lane and Piccadilly.

For the massive assembly exercise in Hyde Park a hundred of the union's full time-officers were drafted as stewards. Early on the scene, they were busy until the end of the day, helping the TUC marshals to get the contingents into good order and then to keep the march moving. For the T & G's official organiser for the march, Len Squire, the day began and ended in the mud in the park. He never got on the march at all. After hours of work getting everybody else on the move he had to dash straight off for a train to keep to his own schedule—a union meeting in Brighton.



Josephine Nelson

The Times

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Morning Star

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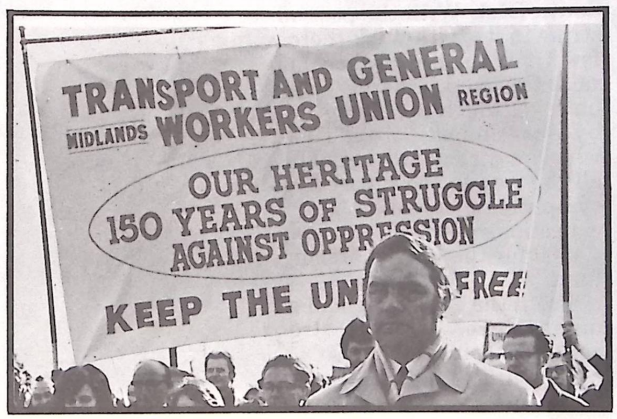

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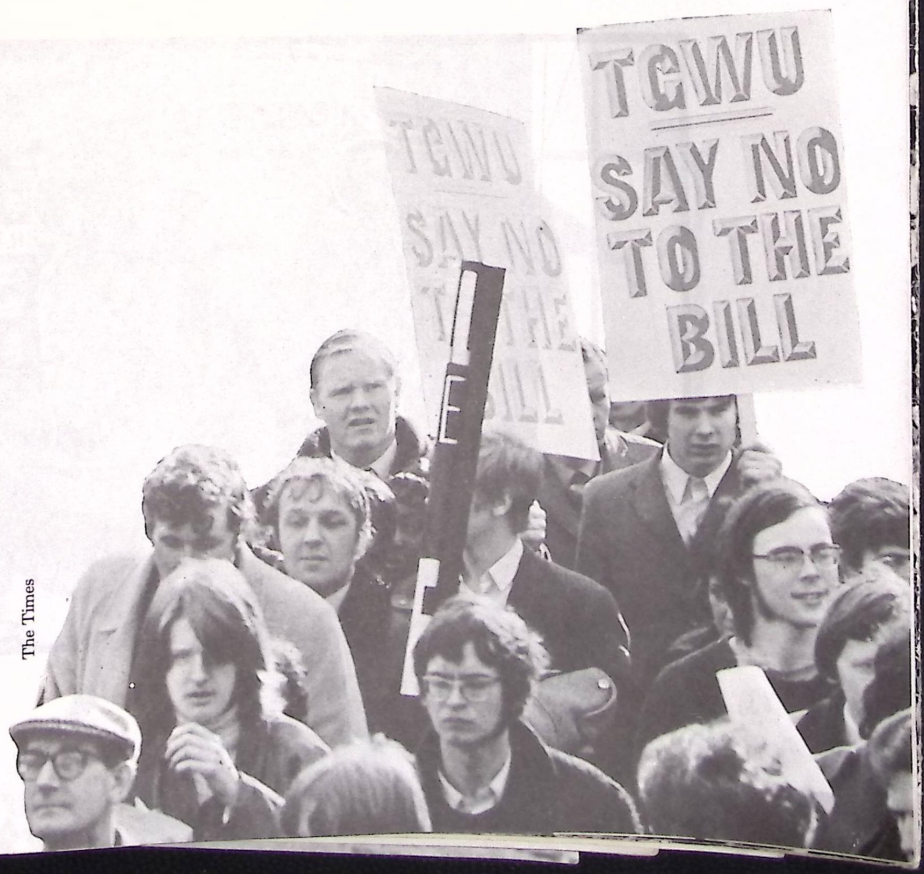


The Times

The Times

State workers take to the city streets

Workers from unions in Britain's other state industries—electricity, gas, railways, steel and the post office—took to bus, train or coach to take part in the demonstration.

At Marylebone, railway workers off their special trains were marching with their bands and banners on Hyde Park soon after noon.

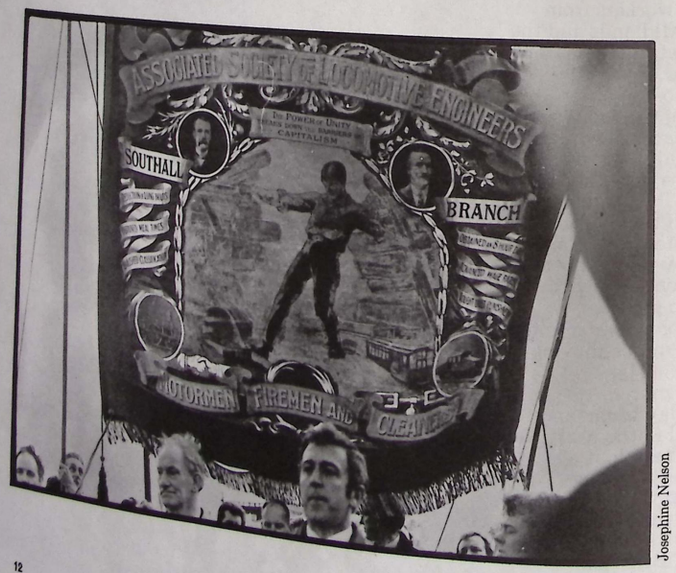
Locomen, guards and booking office staff were all out in strength to protest, swelling the full contingent to 4000 plus.

The huge band of postmen, post office engineers and telephone girls—about 10,000 in all—were mainly from London and the South East. With the post office strike in its sixth week there were few UPW members who could raise the train fare to London however much they were angered by Government policy. Those who could come were applauded all the way to the square by sympathetic onlookers, and collections at the demo raised £4000 for the UPW hardship fund.

From the electricity and gas unions there was a 3500-strong contingent, including two pretty girls in hot pants whose photograph enlivened the front page of the *Daily Express* and the *Morning Star* the next day and an 80-year GMWU banner—certainly the oldest in the union and almost certainly the oldest in the march.

Workers in the iron and steel industry—under threat of being 'hived off' into private ownership again—were out in force, too, behind their national banner. Hand painted on silk by a Royal Academician and 52 years old, it had been borrowed especially for the occasion from its display spot in a Glasgow museum.

Christopher Davies, Report



Josephine Nelson

Josephine Nelson

Morning Star

Daily Telegraph

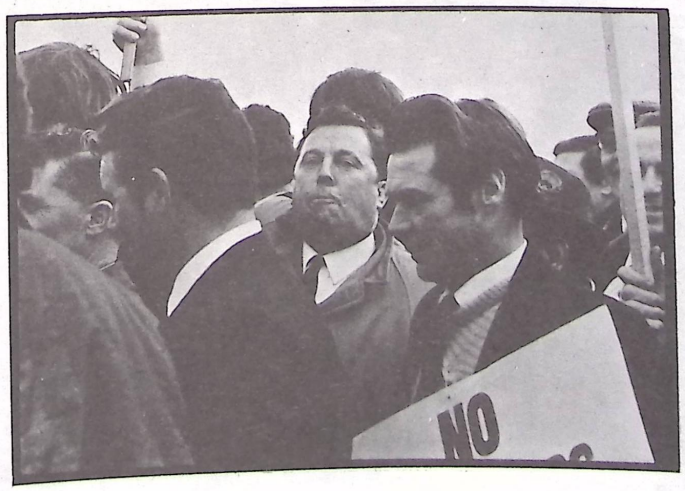
How you get 140,000 from Park to Temple

First everybody has to form up in their respective trades behind the signs—and in the mud—at Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park. Maurice Styles, post office workers' president, keeps it all together from the loudspeaker platform helped by an army of some 500 stewards.

Then you have to catch the eye of your mates as they pour in across Marble Arch roundabout and pick up their placards from the TUC's stock. Soon the bands are tuning up, the banners are hoisted and dead on the appointed time the TUC General Council lead everybody off along Park Lane.

Down the traffic-cleared roads the march moves at measured pace past the wealthy foreign visitors watching from the big hotels in Park Lane. In columns of 3000 or so, each with its band and its chant of protest.

on to page seventeen

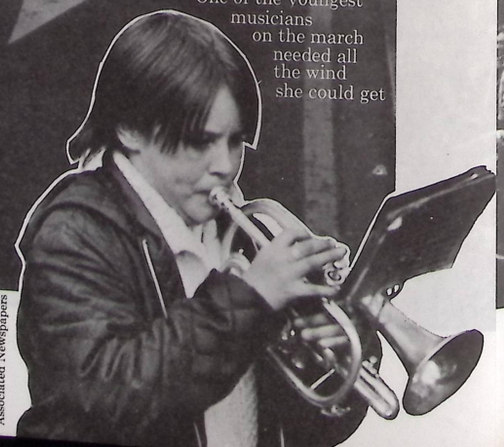


Josephine Nelson

The woodworkers ran into trouble early on in Park Lane when their beautiful London District banner began to tear in the wind.

Luckily, one of the ASW men had been a rigger in the Navy. His running repair job was soon done and with the band at their head the full contingent from the building and furnishing trades moved on—chippies, brickies and painters marching along with the machinists and the upholsterers from the furniture factories of High Wycombe and the East End, Maidstone and Manchester.

One of the youngest musicians on the march needed all the wind she could get



Associated Newspapers

Christopher Davies, Report

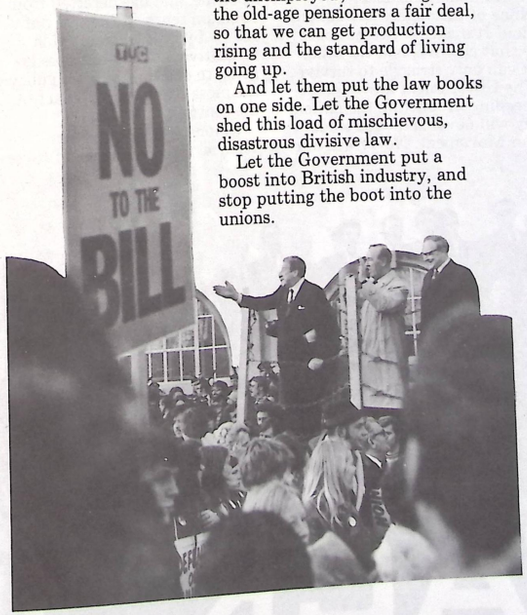
Vic Feather's speech continued

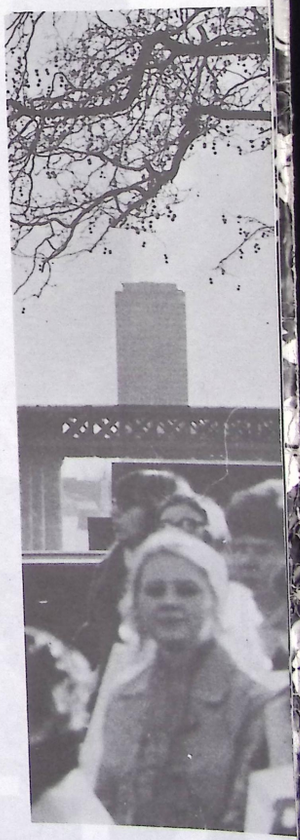
workpeople, for the defence of living standards and democratic rights. And unions will defend themselves, and will defend their members, and will defend the democratic right of free speech and free association.

Let the Government drop this Bill and get on with the job that the people want them to do. Let them stop prices from going up and up; let them find work for the unemployed; let them give the old-age pensioners a fair deal, so that we can get production rising and the standard of living going up.

And let them put the law books on one side. Let the Government shed this load of mischievous, disastrous divisive law.

Let the Government put a boost into British industry, and stop putting the boot into the unions.





Past the Dorchester, past the Hilton, round Hyde Park corner, beneath the Duke of Wellington's iron gaze and into Piccadilly to the chimes of the clock outside the Queen's grocery shop.

Into Piccadilly Circus as the clouds clear and the sun hits Eros' fountain and on past the tourists into Haymarket and its Sunday-still theatres.

Left again at the bottom and the chants pick up again by New Zealand House at the sight and sound of thousands ahead massed in Trafalgar Square singing with the Bargoed male voice choir.

There, while thousands are still in Piccadilly, Park Lane or back in the Park, Victor Feather leads three massive shouts of 'NO' to the Bill loud enough to be heard in Downing Street at the other end of Whitehall.

By now it's clear that there will be two great meetings, not one. So the General Council members who have made their protest speeches clamber off Nelson's plinth to lead the march off down Northumberland Avenue under Charing Cross railway bridge and on to the Embankment.

Around the Co-op milk lorry which serves as the speakers' platform outside Temple Station the chants build up again; 'Kill the Bill' and '1–2–3–4 we don't want no Tory law'.

And then, at last, right up against the City of London's boundaries guarded by the medieval Griffin the march comes to a halt. And still there are thousands pouring round the Square a mile away.

Some had not caught sight of the leaflet explaining the contingency plan to assemble on the Embankment.

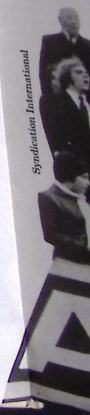
As one man in the journalists' contingent said on passing Cleopatra's Needle three and a half miles from Speaker's Corner, 'If we pass over Blackfriars Bridge I'm calling it a day.'

Josephine Nelson

BOVRIL
SUPPORT POST OFFICE WORKERS - THEY MUST NOT FIGHT ALONE
FREE ROD BASTOW
DEFEAT ANTI-UNION LAWS! MAKE THE TORY GOVERNMENT RESIGN
OUT BILL
NO BILL

Associated Newspapers

Associated Newspapers



Syndication International

Central Press

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Josephine Nelson

Associated Newspapers

One of the youngest musicians on the march needed all the wind she could get

Associated Newspapers

Heath is 'splitting the nation'–Vic Feather speaks from Nelson's plinth

We are out today—thousands more than in any demonstration London has seen, or Britain has seen this century.

This is D-day 1971. D for Demonstration. D for Democracy. And for every man and woman on the march today, there are scores of others who wanted to be here but could not come.

All of us know what this Bill is for. It is to strengthen the power of the employers and to weaken the hands of working people and to cripple their trade unions.

In the nation today there are already three quarters of a million people without a job. If by Christmas there are a million unemployed—and that could be the total if things go on as they are—what sort of nation will it be for those families where the bread-winner is out of work?

What sort of a living is it for the four million people who take home £16 or less for a full week's work. But it is the man on £160 a week who has been promised the big cut in his income tax. And in this nation the old people are still kept waiting for a pension that will make ends meet.

None of this makes Britain one nation. It makes it two nations. One that can live, and the other that can only struggle to survive.

The Government are succeeding in splitting the nation. They will never split this trade union Movement. Never was our Movement more united. Never was it more resolute in its resistance to attack.

And working people everywhere —even outside the unions—are now seeing the truth as trade unionists see it: the truth, that instead of tackling the nation's problems, the Government is trying to shackle the unions, to gag the shop stewards, and to silence the rank and file.

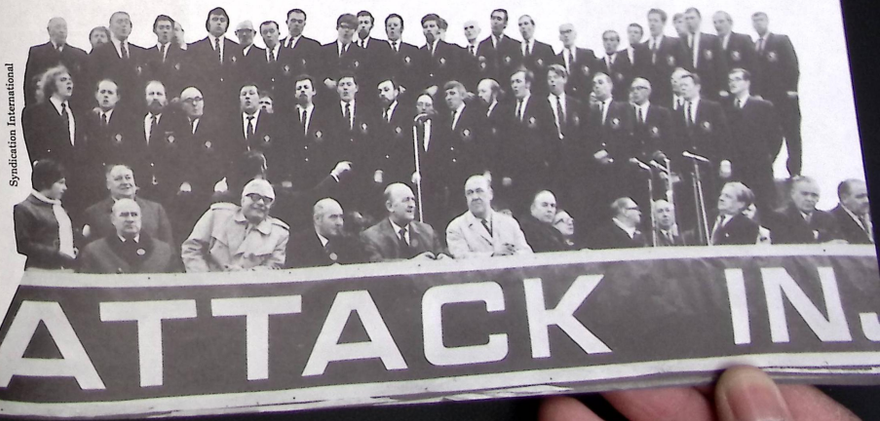
Trade unions are organisations of ordinary people, formed by ordinary people, and run by and for ordinary people. They were not formed by Governments to do what Governments want—or face the risk of being dragged before the Courts.

I ask this one simple question: if the unions are not strong enough and free enough to help the underpaid to win a decent standard of living for their families, who will do it? And here is one simple answer: nobody.

I am more for common sense than case law. In industry we want more common sense than common law.

But the Government is committed to dogma and doctrine, and has deserted from common sense. If they do not realise by now where all this legislative monkey business is going to end up, they are guilty of the most stupid political act of the century.

Unions were formed for defence, for the defence of (over)



Syndication International

ATTACK IN

Twenty to five and still going strong

While General Council speakers were still addressing the 40,000 in Trafalgar Square, at the back of the plinth Victor Feather and Jack Jones and Fred Hayday were preparing to move on to address the second mass meeting at Temple on the Embankment.

Twenty to five on the Big Ben clock and they were still waiting for all the marchers to move along the embankment to the Co-op milk lorry meeting stand at Temple station.

Just three days before the march took place, millions of people had been told of some of the major trade union objections to the Industrial Relations Bill through newspaper advertisements placed by the TUC. One is shown on the next page.

The Guardian

Agitators. Troublemakers. Reds. Do shop stewards live up to their names?

It's easy to think they do.

It's easy to blame them for all our industrial and economic troubles.

Easy, but wrong.

Because shop stewards aren't a separate breed bent on our country's destruction.

They are just ordinary men and women elected by their fellow workers to do a difficult job.

Unfortunately, most people haven't a true idea what that job really is. So here are the facts.

First, it's the steward's job to explain all the intricacies of working life: explain deductions, piece rates, bonuses. A sort of one man advice bureau.

Second, it's the steward's job to sort out a workmate's problems: help him claim sickness benefit, say, or arrange new shift timings if he's having trouble at home.

Third, it's the steward's job to stand up for his workmate's rights.

This is his most important job. And the least understood.

It doesn't mean calling strikes willy-nilly. It means responsible bargaining and straight talking.

After all, there are some two hundred thousand shop stewards in this country sorting out thousands of problems each week.

How many of these problems end in strikes? A minute fraction.

And when they do it's often because management have failed to consult the steward until it's too late.

This, then, is the work shop stewards really do. It's hardly the work of agitators or trouble makers.

In fact, a Royal Commission in an independent report describes shop steward's work as 'more of a lubricant than an irritant' in industry.

Unfortunately, the Government doesn't see it that way.

Their Industrial Relations Bill seeks to tie down the shop steward with legal red tape.

It seeks to replace his common-sense bargaining with pedantic legal argument.

How can the steward make practical settlements quickly if they have to be handed over to lawyers to be vetted?

How can he speak up for his workmates never knowing when his words could land him with a fine?

The steward is a working man, not a Doctor of Law.

Under these restrictions it'll be almost impossible for him to do the job he was elected to do.

A job which everyone involved in industrial relations knows to be vital. Everyone, it seems, but the Government.

The Trades Union Congress
If it's a crime to fight for a better life, we're guilty

Issued by the T.U.C., Congress House, Great Russell Street, W.C.1.

Seven thousand printers in seven mile march

London's printworkers had to travel less than most to take part in the TUC rally. But they ended up marching farther than anybody.

Their rallying point was St George's Circus close to the Elephant & Castle but a good two and a half mile hike from Hyde Park.

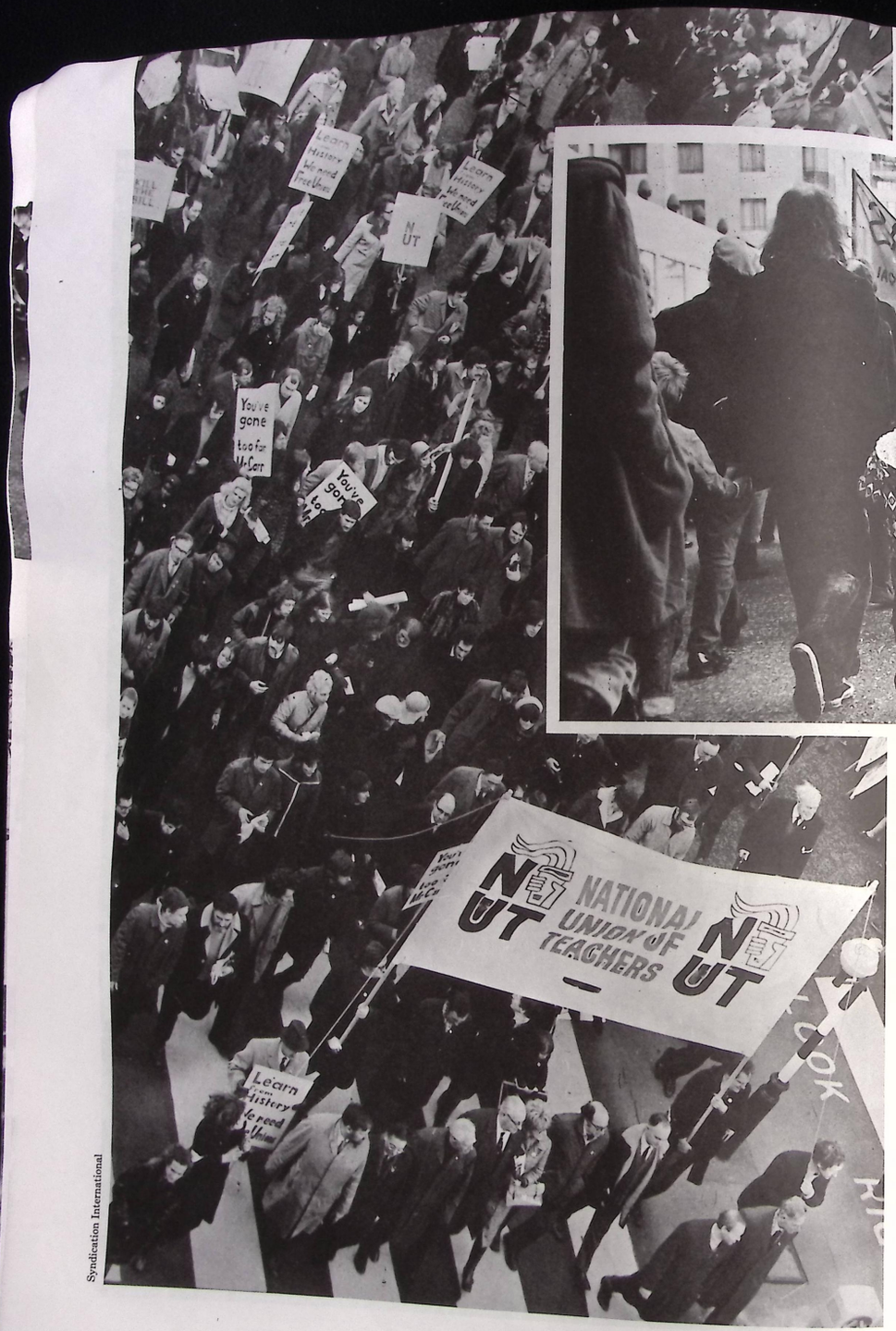
Across Waterloo Bridge and down Kingsway and Oxford Street the seven thousand marched to join the columns already in the Park.

Their 'Kill the Bill' chants were as loud as ever when they set off again with the Dagenham Girl Pipers at their head for Trafalgar Square. By the time they got there the Square was packed to bursting point. So still they marched on—this time with Victor Feather and other General Council members leading the way —for the mass meeting on the Embankment.

Photographers caught up with the huge column as they marched past the Savoy in the late afternoon sun.

The Times

Associated Newspapers



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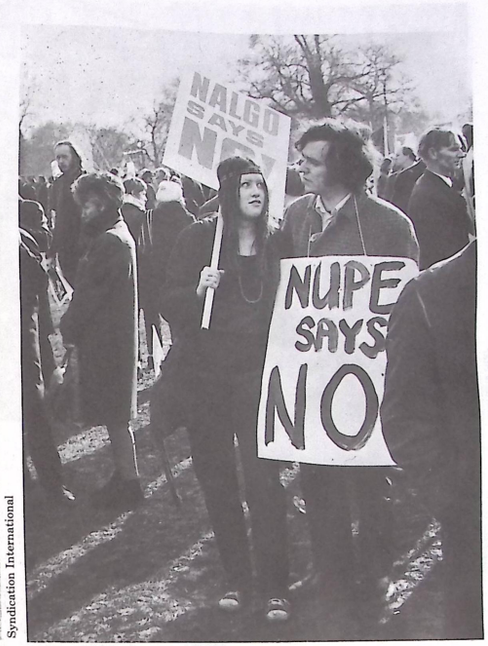


Public servants all say 'NO'

Workers in Britain's public services—as uneasy about the Bill as many in the private sector—were out in strength to voice their opposition on TUC Demo Day.

For NALGO and the teachers it was debut day as well—the first time ever they had joined their fellow trade unionists in a national march of protest.

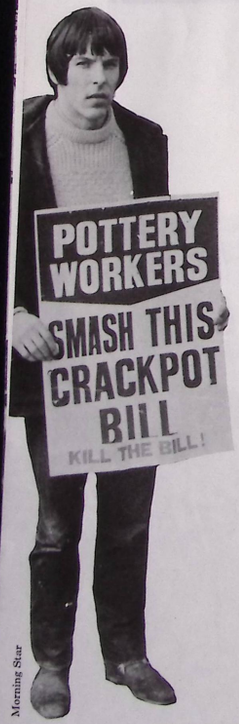
A forest of 'NALGO says No' placards led off the town hall workers and not far behind came the 2000-strong NUT contingent with their own messages for the author of the Bill—'Learn from history—we need free unions' and 'Don't give Mr Chips his chips'.

Tucked in between were the thousand men and women who had come from all over the country to make up the National Union of Public Employees delegation. They were complete with Dixieland jazz band—and one marcher's large Dalmatian dog.

The firemen were there, too, with their own band, extinguishing all hopes that rigging the law on industrial relations would damp down public sector wage claims.

Public Service

Morning Star



Morning Star

All unions great and small

From unions large and small the members came to London from the four corners of Britain for the great demonstration.

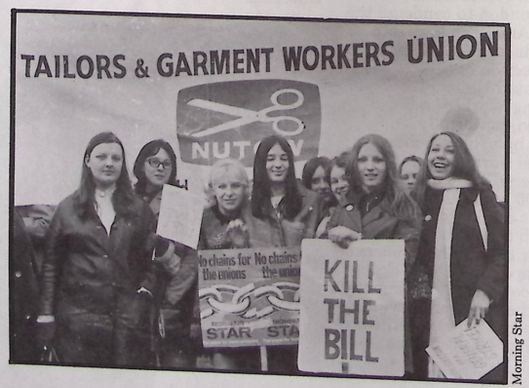
Farm workers from Dorset and Devon decked out like the Tolpuddle Martyrs of 1834 met their mates from the rural areas of the Midlands, East Anglia and the North before marching behind their national banner to Trafalgar Square and beyond.

Boot and shoe workers had trouble in getting the long poles of their new banner down to the Underground platform at Euston but they found a way in the end.

But first into Euston were five hundred of the men and women who make the world's finest china on their way to claim a place in the seven-mile column.

The girls who make up minis, midis, maxis, or whatever in the country's clothing factories were there to add their own flair to the protest.

And there must be a special word for the Kidderminster carpet weavers. Two coach loads of their members came to join the march and with them they brought one of the most delicate banners to be seen on the day.



Morning Star

Associated Newspapers

Pat Mantle

Daily Telegraph

Their protest on the record

White-collar workers, white-coated workers, roll-neck sweater workers all came to make their protests against the Bill.

Counter hands and cashiers from shops, stores and supermarkets in all England's big cities marched under USDAW banners. Typists and secretaries insisted 'No Dictation'; civil servants backed them up; musicians were out to beat the Bill; technicians and scientific workers, too, were firm against it; while the banners of stage and TV performers proclaimed 'Our Profession in Peril'.

The film makers were there, too—and not only to march and protest. Four ACTT crews were scurrying about during the day, their cameras trained on the biggest crowd scenes of their careers, to make for the TUC—and for history—a film that colourfully encapsulates in 15 minutes of music and movement the spirit of a three-hour march.

Morning Star

The ones who saw it all

The story went the rounds that some of the women weavers from Lancashire got no further than the Park on their trip to London. Stuck outside Euston in their special train while a signal box fire was put out, they were late to the Park, it was said. Then, after waiting three hours for their column to move off, they had to call it a day and rush back to Euston to catch the train north. It's a story they could have told for years afterwards.

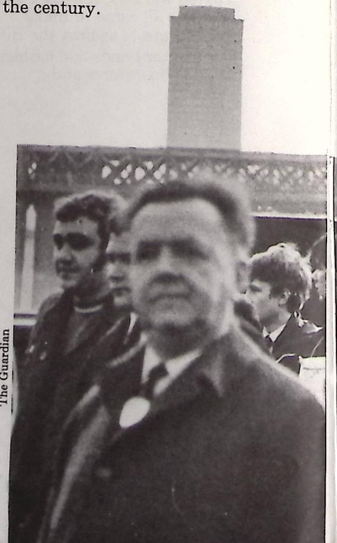
The truth is, however, that all the 3000 weavers and textile workers were on the march, singing as they went, to the delight of the watching crowds on the pavements.

It was only when they reached Trafalgar Square that some of them had to duck into the Underground to reach Euston in a hurry. The rest carried on, still singing, to the big overflow meeting on the Embankment at Temple station.

For the many others who marched with them under the banners bearing the names of their home towns and their local Trades Councils there were no complaints either.

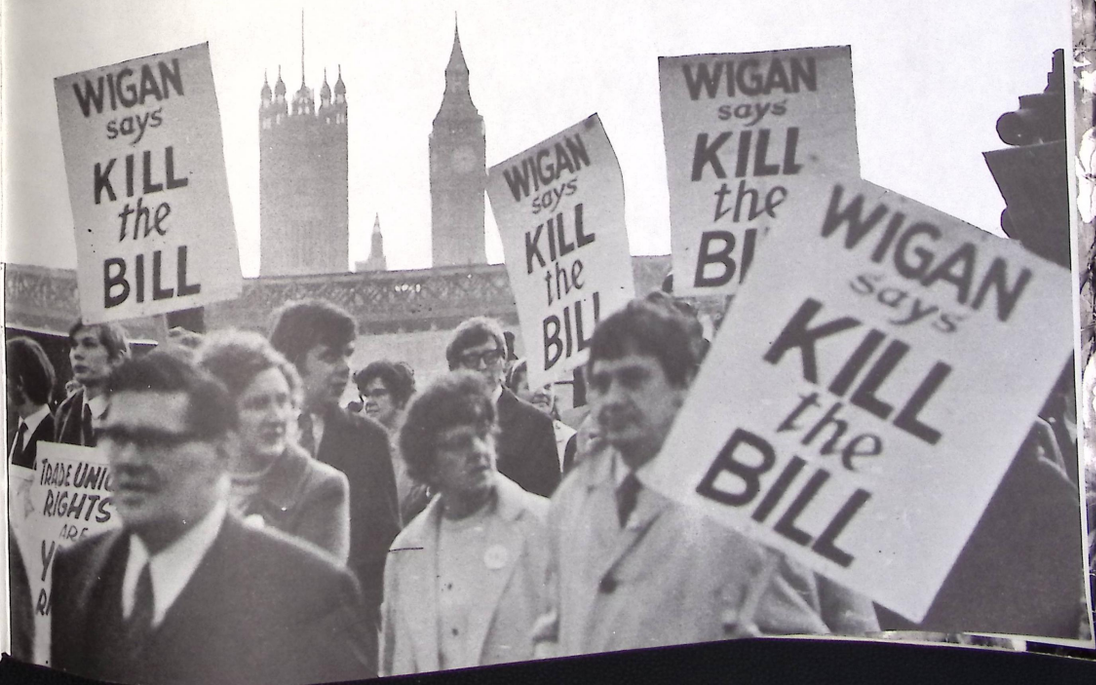
They had proudly formed the rearguard of a great march. And while they were watching the others move off in the Park or passing down alongside the massed thousands in Trafalgar Square, they knew that they alone had seen the full scale of this, the greatest demonstration of the century.

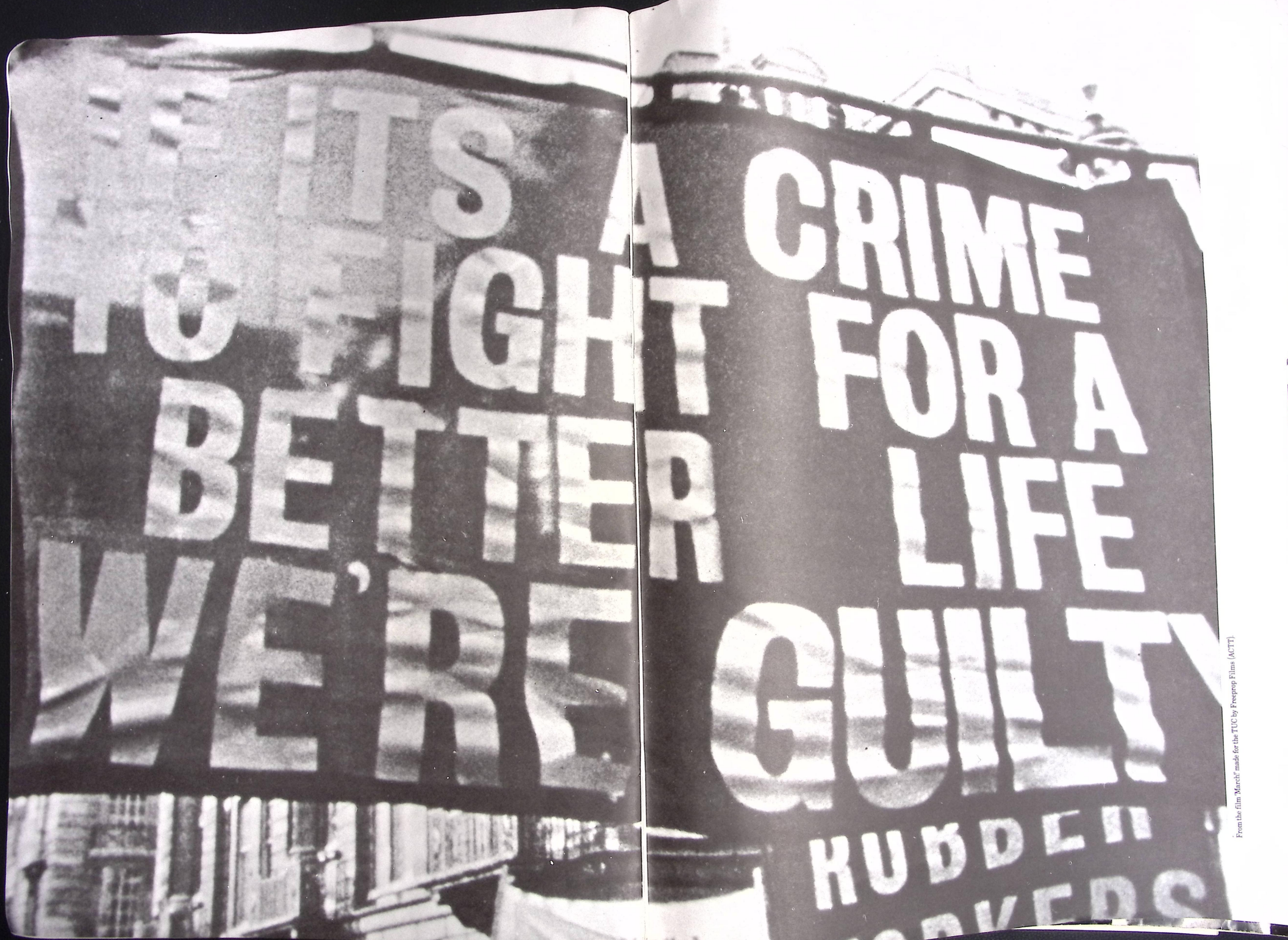
North Western Newspapers



The Guardian

Christopher Davies, Report





From the film 'March' made for the TUC by Freeprop Films (ACTT)

Published by the Trades Union Congress Congress House Great Russell Street WC1

TUC

Printed by the Chapel River Press for the Victoria House Printing Co. 93 Long Acre WC2